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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 000410

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FOR EUR/CARC; ALSO PASS OBO, EUR-IO/EX

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TAGS: PREL PHUM KDEM ENRG FPET AMGT ABLD CASC AJ

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S APRIL 6 MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER MAMMDYAROV: IRAN, ENERGY, AND A ROUNDUP OF BILATERAL ISSUES

REF: A. BAKU 000374

¶B. STATE 41602

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶11. (C) Summary: In an April 6 meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Mammadyarov clarified recent press rumors that Iran closed the border with Azerbaijan in early April, explaining that Iranian passport machines had malfunctioned and caused a brief delay for those crossing the border. This had been deliberately spun up by those seeking to fuel tensions. On energy issues, Mammadyarov reported that Azerbaijan, Turkey and possibly Georgia would meet in early May to review gas transit issues, but he was noncommittal to a June IEA conference in Baku. Mammadyarov said the April visit of Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov demonstrated that the Kazakhs are "strong and interested" in a regional transport corridor; Mammadyarov's planned April 18-19 visit to Turkmenistan, however, has been postponed because Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov plans a trip to Saudi Arabia at that time. Following his democracy discussions in Washington, Mammadyarov reported that Minister of Internal Affairs (MIA) Usubov is not interested in hosting the new USG police advisor at the MIA, proposing he work from the Embassy; Mammadyarov also gave further background on the new human rights commission. Mammadyarov welcomed the agenda for our April 19 security talks, but said DFM Azimov would be unable to participate in the CENTCOM Iraq conference. The Ambassador updated Mammadyarov on our efforts to identify a site for the NEC and emphasized that we must sign a conditional lease before the end of May. She also asked for Mammadyarov's assistance in resolving eight outstanding adoption cases and pressed for more information on the April 26-28 OIC conference on the media's role in promoting tolerance. End Summary.

Countering War-Related Rumors about Iran

¶12. (C) In an April 6 meeting with Foreign Minister Mammadyarov, the Ambassador reviewed her efforts through interviews with local media to dispel press rumors that the US is preparing to attack Iran. Mammadyarov said there are "lots of forces circulating information" that is inaccurate, including through the internet, with the goal of "increasing tensions," adding that Minister of National Security Mahmudov seeks to identify those responsible for circulating this false information. Mammadyarov clarified recent press rumors that Iran had closed the border with Azerbaijan (ref A). He

explained that Iran recently installed new passport reading devices on the Azerbaijani-Iranian border, and that some of these devices had slowed down border traffic for two hours on April 3. Local press quickly ran with the story and reported that Iran had closed the border, according to the Foreign Minister. Mammadyarov criticized local media as "immature" and unwilling to check the facts before going to print. Mammadyarov noted that he has not heard any updates from the Azerbaijani ambassador posted to Tehran. The Ambassador assured Mammadyarov that the USG is sensitive to the GOAJ's difficult position vis-a-vis Iran. The Ambassador shared U/S Burn's March 29 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as an overview of US strategy toward Iran.

Regional Energy Tidbits

¶3. (C) The Ambassador said EUR DAS Matthew Bryza would like to have the first meeting of our bilateral energy security dialogue in June in Baku. The Ambassador remarked that Bryza also prefers an early meeting hosted by the IEA in Baku to reassure European states who are doubting Azerbaijan's ability to provide them with gas. Mammadyarov said he preferred a later date to ensure the first meeting will have "serious results." The Ambassador replied that at Energy Ambassador Aleskerov's request, the USG is preparing a concept paper, to be discussed with the MFA after its completion.

¶4. (C) In response to the Ambassador's request for an update on the GOAJ's attempt to secure a gas transit agreement with Turkey, Mammadyarov said representatives from Azerbaijan and Turkey -- with possible Georgian representation --will meet in the beginning of May for consultations on this issue. The

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Ambassador pressed Mammadyarov whether the meeting would include a political agreement on the transit issue. Mammadyarov suggested that while Baku and Ankara are discussing an agreement in principle, they have not begun talks on a specific written agreement. Mammadyarov remarked that the issue "is a question of cost" and that Azerbaijan does not want a "mini-Gazprom." Mammadyarov said he would consult with Finance Minister Sharifov next week about next steps in this process.

¶5. (C) On Azerbaijani discussions with Greece, Mammadyarov said he is still waiting for an invitation from the Greek Foreign Ministry, per his discussions with Bryza during his visit to DC. Mammadyarov claimed he was ready to go to Greece to discuss gas and welcomed any assistance we could provide in pushing Athens for an invitation.

¶6. (C) On Kazakhstan, Mammadyarov said that Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov -- who visited Baku on April 4 -- was "strong and interested" in a South Caucasus transport corridor, referring to gas transit and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railroad. Mammadyarov cautioned, however, that the Kazakhs are "scared to death" of Russia, perhaps because of Nazarbayev's concerns about his political future.

¶7. (C) Regarding Turkmenistan, Mammadyarov complained that Ashgabat recently changed the timing for Mammadyarov's planned April 18-19 visit. Mammadyarov remarked that Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov has decided to go to Saudi Arabia for his first foreign visit, and Mammadyarov did not see a point in going to Ashgabat if he could not meet with Berdimuhamedov. Mammadyarov said Turkmen Foreign Minister Meredov was a "nice guy, but cannot decide anything." Mammadyarov said that the ball is now in Turkmenistan's court regarding the timing for his visit, but he noted that the trip would probably occur in May. Mammadyarov said that he has not discussed opening an Azerbaijani embassy in Turkmenistan with Ashgabat yet. (Septel on April 9 meeting between the Ambassador and Deputy Foreign Minister Khalafov provides more detail on Azerbaijan-Turkmen relations.)

Democracy Dialogue Follow-up

¶18. (C) Mammadyarov opened the meeting by reviewing several follow-up steps he has taken on our bilateral democracy agenda since returning from his March visit to Washington. Mammayarov said he had spoken with Minister of Internal Affairs (MIA) Usubov regarding the USG offer of additional training courses and a proposed USG resident police advisor based in the MIA. Usubov supported expanding the types of courses offered, and accepted the police advisor, but was not open to having the advisor based at the MIA, citing space constraints. The Ambassador noted that she would follow up with Usubov regarding the advisor proposal to see if the spacing issue could be addressed.

¶19. (C) Mammadyarov said Central Election Commission (CEC) Chair Panahov found his meetings in the US "useful." Mammadyarov agreed on the need for the CEC to be composed of non-partisan members and said he had suggested that Panahov examine how Georgia's CEC is composed, since this is a democratic model. Mammadyarov affirmed that he was following up with this issue.

¶10. (C) Referring to Azerbaijan's new National Action Plan on Human Rights, Mammadyarov said he thought the newly-established human rights commission fell under Presidential Apparatus Chief Ramiz Mehdiyev's authority, not the Cabinet of Ministers. This commission will develop an action plan to promote human rights in Azerbaijan. The Ambassador raised the possibility of A/S Lowenkron visiting Azerbaijan to consult with the GOAJ before the plan is finalized as discussed in Washington. The Ambassador also raised USG concerns regarding the collegium's (the Azerbaijani bar association) lack of independence.

¶11. (C) Despite President Aliyev's stated commitment to holding a dialogue with political parties, the Ambassador said the Embassy has received some mixed signals. Notably, the executive director of the pro-government New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) Ali Ahmadov appeared to have little enthusiasm for dialogue with other political parties. Mammadyarov

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suggested that the Embassy speak with the OSCE and Mehdiyev. On the issue of opposition politicians going to PACE, Mammadyarov said that in his personal opinion, Musavat leader Isa Gamber should make a public statement recognizing the legitimacy of the Azerbaijani parliament, and said he has discussed this with Samad Seyidov, who is the head of the Azerbaijani PACE delegation to PACE.

New Embassy Compound

¶12. (C) The Ambassador noted that Presidential Aide for Economic Affairs, Ali Asadov, has been assisting the Embassy in its search for a suitable property. The Ambassador also said that Mammadyarov's statement to the Secretary regarding the GOAJ's commitment to help the USG find a suitable property was helpful. The Ambassador emphasized that we now need to secure conditional leases on several properties by the end of May that will enable an inspection team to begin its initial work. Mammadyarov remarked that he would talk with Asadov to keep this process moving in the right direction.

Bilateral Security Dialogue

¶13. (C) The Ambassador provided Mammadyarov with a draft agenda for the April 19 dialogue, noting that security is one of the three pillars in our bilateral relationship. Mammadyarov welcomed the agenda and stated that the dialogue should be "very good."

Adoptions

¶14. (C) Ambassador raised concern about the issue of eight pending adoptions, which appear to be caught between the Presidential Administration and the State Committee on Women and Children. (Note: We followed up after the meeting with Americas desk officer Tamerlan Vahabov concerning this issue. Vahabov promised to raise this point with Deputy Foreign Minister Khalafov, who deals with these legal issues.)

OIC Conference on Religious Tolerance

¶15. (C) The Ambassador requested more details on the conference, as the Department seeks to develop a position on how the USG should be represented. Mammadyarov suggested that the Ambassador follow up with Deputy Foreign Minister Sadikov, who is responsible for the conference. Mammadyarov also said Americas desk officer Tamerlan Vahabov could provide us with more information.

CENTCOM Conference on Iraq

¶16. (C) Ambassador provided Mammadyarov with information regarding reftel B conference on Iraq. The Ambassador suggested Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov would be an appropriate attendee from the Azerbaijani MFA. Mammadyarov noted that he and Azimov will be in Brussels for consultations on Azerbaijan's IPAP during the conference.
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